

Remarks at the National Governors' Association Dinner

February 21, 1999

Good evening. Governor and Mrs. Carper, Governor and Mrs. Leavitt, ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to the White House.

Two of my proudest possessions, which I have over at the Oval Office, are an original printing of the proceeds of the first Governors' conference, held at the invitation of President Theodore Roosevelt—formerly Governor of New York—in 1908, and the subject was the conservation of America's natural resources. The second is a picture taken on the front steps of the White House of the President and all the Governors in that year, with a letter signed with the picture by every serving Governor in 1992—some of you signed it—to me on the occasion of my election as President.

I see the picture every day. I see the book every day, and it reminds me of how much I enjoyed being a Governor and how much I very much enjoyed these Governors' meetings.

Six years ago, when I took office, I pledged a new era of partnership with the Governors. I have done my best to deliver on that pledge. I found that, when being a Governor, that it was easy to do the job when the economy was working than when it wasn't. [Laughter] So I hope you have found the same. I pledged to work on eliminating the deficit, and now we are into our second year of surpluses. I pledged to work with you on welfare reform, and I know all of you are very proud that the welfare rolls are about half the size they were in 1993. I pledged to work with you and your communities on crime, and the crime rate is at its lowest level in 25 years. I pledged to work on a cleaner environment in a way that would permit the economy to continue to grow, and together we have made progress on that and many other areas.

I also pledged to continue the practice I adopted as Governor of stealing the best ideas from other States I could possibly find. [Laughter] Among other things, we have adopted Georgia's HOPE scholarship and many other ideas that many of you brought into being.

For all these things, I thank you. I thank you for the work you continue to do. I thank you for the model you continue to set. In 6 years, I have concluded what I suspected when I came here, which is that Washington works best when it works as Governors and as the National Governors' Association work: across party lines; focusing on ideas, not ideology; on people, not politics; on unity, not division. For all that you do to build that kind of America in the 21st century, I thank you.

I look forward to our meeting tomorrow, and I ask you to join me in a toast to Governor and Mrs. Carper, Governor and Mrs. Leavitt, the Governors, their spouses, and our beloved country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to National Governors' Association Chairman Gov. Tom Carper of Delaware and his wife, Martha; and NGA Vice Chairman Gov. Michael O. Leavitt of Utah and his wife, Jacalyn.

Remarks at the National Governors' Association Meeting

February 22, 1999

I know we're beginning a little late, so I will get right into my remarks and try to truncate them a little bit so we can have the maximum amount of time for discussion. Let me begin by saying that Hillary and I were delighted to have you here last night. We had a wonderful time. This room is in a little different condition than it was last evening, but I hope both events will prove to be enjoyable.

Let me say that I have been a participant in one way or the other in every Governors' meeting since 1979, for 20 years. I had the privilege of serving with 150 of my fellow Americans as Governors over a 12-year period. One of the best has passed away in the last few months, Governor Lawton Chiles of Florida. And I wanted to mention him both because he was an important member of the NGA and because he had the good sense to go from Washington back home, instead of the other way around.

I wanted to thank Governor Jeb Bush for his proposal to set aside some of the tobacco settlement money in Florida for the foundation named in Governor Chiles' name, for